

Kitchen and Restaurant Safety

News of food poisoning and customer injuries can spread quickly and impact businesses adversely. It's no wonder that when the topic of restaurant safety comes up, these are the issues that are at the top of the minds of owners and managers. What they often do not know, however, is that the cost of such incidents actually pale in comparison to the costs associated with employee injuries, which include:

- Loss of key employees
- Hiring replacements
- Training new employees
- Overtime to make up for injured employees
- Lower employee moral
- Strained customer care
- Damaged reputation
- Increased stress of doing business
- Fines from regulatory agencies
- Higher workers' compensation costs

There are unique challenges associated with the restaurant industry that can impact employee safety significantly. Some of the common challenges are listed below, followed by ways they can be mitigated and injuries prevented.

Employee Turnover

Employee turnover in restaurants is generally high. This makes hiring, training and supervising employees a recurring, and often time-consuming task. It also increases the likelihood of employee injury. Inexperienced staff, compromised hiring practices, less time spent on training and orientation or dedicated to safety issues, language barriers, and reduced opportunity for a "safety culture" to develop, all correlate with increased risk of injury. Under these circumstances maintaining strict hiring practices and a well-designed orientation program become all the more vital, as does discharging detrimental employees before they have a negative impact on a business.

Slips and Falls

Slips and falls are the most common cause of serious employee injuries in restaurants. Frequent causes include spilled liquids, built-up grease, oil on the floor, condensation in walk-in refrigerators, and carrying off-balance loads. Head trauma, broken bones, serious lacerations, back strains, sprained wrists and knee injuries are often the result. Below are ways to reduce this risk:

- FLOOR CLEANING should be done on a regular and frequent basis. Use appropriate cleaning agents and equipment, and rinse well to eliminate any residue.
- SLIP RESISTANT SHOES or slip-proof shoes greatly reduce the number of slip-and-fall incidents in many businesses and should be worn by all employees. Some employers choose to subsidize the cost of these shoes for their employees.
- SLIP RESISTANT MATS should be placed in areas where frequent buildup of liquids, oils, or grease occurs. Make sure the mats do not slide when walked upon. Anchoring the mats to a stationary object helps eliminate this problem.
- SPILL KITS should be available in key areas. These should contain oil-absorbent products, rags or paper towels, a caution sign or cone, newspaper (to put over a spill), and a dustpan and whiskbroom to pick up spilled items quickly. The purpose of spill kits is to control the area quickly and eliminate slipping sources. The kit can be stored in a box or bucket labeled "spill kit." Most important, NEVER leave a spill unattended. Someone should always stay with the spill to warn passerbys of the hazards until a mop or spill kit can be used to clean up the mess.
- STRICT POLICIES on spills should be in place. Employees should be trained and held accountable for following proper procedures.

Lacerations

These are the most frequent injuries among restaurant employees. Sources of lacerations are typically knives, meat slicers and broken glass. Below are some practices that help mitigate this common type of injury:

- SHARP KNIVES preclude the need for applying increased force when cutting and subsequent slippage that may result. Cuts from sharp knives also heal faster than those from dull knives.
- PROCEDURES FOR BROKEN GLASS should be implemented and strictly enforced. Broken glass should never be handled with bare hands. Wrap broken glass in cardboard or thick newspaper. Dispose of broken glass in specific containers.
- CUT RESISTANT GLOVES are also a good means of reducing lacerations. Often called Kevlar gloves, these gloves are made of a tough, cut-resistant material. These are ideal for tasks involving repeated cuts, such as slicing meat, bread or vegetables.
- SLICER CLEANING PROCEDURES should be in place. Always unplug the slicer machine before cleaning, adjusting or changing parts.
- TRAIN employees on how to use knives safely.
- USE ALTERNATIVES to cutting with knives. Food processors and presses can greatly reduce the source of lacerations.

Burns

Burns are painful and can result in permanent injury. Here are some important ways to prevent and treat burn injuries:

- TURN OFF POWER to fryers, stoves and ovens prior to cleaning. This includes vent hoods. Make sure burn sources are cool.
- COOL OIL before disposal. Always avoid moving hot oil.
- WEAR LONG SLEEVES to cover the forearms. They are the area of the body most vulnerable to burns when cooking or cleaning.

- USE COLD WATER to treat burns. Most burns require medical attention due to a high rate of infection.
- USE POT HOLDERS when handling pots and pans.
- AVOID LOOSE CLOTHING AND LONG HAIR when working near open flames.
- AVOID SCALDING HOT WATER when cleaning or doing dishes.
- REGULATE TEMPERATURE on the coffee machine. It should not generate scalding hot liquids and should be monitored and corrected as needed.

Manual Material Handling

- PROPER STORAGE PRACTICES should be followed. Light items should be stored on higher shelves, heaviest items on middle shelves (between chest and waist level) and medium weight items should be stored on lower shelves.
- ASSISTIVE DEVICES should be used often when lifting. Use carts, hand trucks and other assistive devices to move large or heavy loads. If the load is too heavy, get help. Use carts to transport bus tubs, serving trays or appliances.
- PROPER LIFTING PROCEDURES should be practiced. Lift with your legs and avoid bending your back. Do not twist or jerk. When moving tables or chairs, get help.

These are just a just a few of the most common injury exposures in the restaurant business. It is up to you and your staff to practice safety and injury prevention. Proper training, supervisor accountability, and employee participation are vital to creating awareness and establishing a culture that embraces safety and health. These will all help foster happier, healthier employees, better customer service, and ultimately support a more profitable business.

Contact your Safety & Health consultant for assistance or additional information.

Zenith provides workplace safety resources at:

TheZenith.com[®]

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